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SUBJECT: 2008 SWANEE HUNT AWARD NOMINATION

REF: STATE 20994

¶1. Per Reftel, post nominates Ms. Basma Amawi, senior Cultural Affairs Specialist at U.S. Embassy Amman.  
Citation: "For advancing the public role of Jordanian women and helping empower them in the judicial and political spheres. Ms. Amawi undertook sustained, outstanding, and creative use of exchanges and other programs to build effective leadership among Jordanian women."

¶2. Justification: Ms. Basma Amawi, the senior Cultural Affairs Specialist at U.S. Embassy Amman, has effectively countered the marginalization of women in her own society. Through people-to-people exchanges and leadership training programs she has helped create networks for the legal protection of women, contributed to their economic empowerment, reached out to the Islamic community, and used innovative tools such as medical diplomacy. Ms. Amawi's greatest strength is her perseverance. She has applied it over the course of twenty years in identifying, cultivating, and nominating promising women for various projects. She has subsequently reached out to them, included them in Embassy events and encouraged them to apply for small grants to strengthen civil society. The impact of her efforts, which has manifested itself especially in the past year, is enormous.

¶3. Using USG, as well as private, exchange programs to their fullest, Ms. Amawi has tapped into every available opportunity, such as the International Visitor Leadership Program, MEPI projects, and her own custom-made exchanges in collaboration with USAID. In addition, she has arranged for U.S. speaker programs promoting women's rights throughout the country, including one that featured Ambassador Hunt a few years ago. The range of her contacts, from students to ministers, is phenomenal. It is an asset she uses to nudge her society toward according women their full rights.

#### ¶4. Equal Protection for Women under the Law

Perhaps the most noteworthy focus of Ms. Amawi's efforts has been her support to human rights activists. Early on she identified two young women who have become among the most influential people in Jordan. Both went on International Visitor tours in 1995. One of them, Asma Khader, is now Jordan's most respected legal scholar and an activist on women's rights. She heads the Jordanian National Commission for Women. The other, a journalist named Rana Husseini, exposed in print the previously hidden crime of honor killings. Even five years ago, the topic of honor crimes was such a taboo that a MEPI grant to Freedom House could not be seen as addressing this issue. Ms. Amawi was involved in finding a way forward under the theme of domestic violence. She helped to put Freedom House in touch with the Performing Arts Center, which launched interactive plays throughout Jordan that made people think about this issue.

¶5. MEPI was also able to make use of the extensive circle of contacts that Ms. Amawi had cultivated over the course of the years when they set up the Arab Women's Legal Network and the Arab Council for Judicial and Legal Studies. Both institutions continue to facilitate the advancement of Arab women working in the legal profession.

## 16. Economic and Political Empowerment

Ms. Amawi helped the MENA Businesswomen's Network, a partnership between local businesswomen's groups across the Middle East, the Beyster Institute, and the Middle East Partnership Initiative. She helped to arrange the launch of the Network at the Ambassador's residence when fifty accomplished women business leaders from the United States joined fifty business owners from the Middle East. She played an important role in the visit of five leading Jordanian businesswomen to the U.S. to take part in the Arab Business Summit in Washington D.C.

## 17. Ms. Amawi changed the lives of two female Jordanian politicians:

In 1997 she spotted Nawal Faouri, a woman active in the Islamic Action Front, the party with roots in the Muslim Brotherhood, and nominated her for an International Visitor project. The party tried to prevent Ms. Faouri from participating in a U.S. Government program but she went anyway, quit the IAF, and founded the Islamic Centrist Party. Through the years, Ms. Amawi put forward the name of Ms. Faouri for various other programs. Today, Ms. Faouri is one of six women in the Jordanian Senate.

18. Rana Hajaia was a young activist who headed the Pioneer Women's Network in the provincial district of Tafileh in southern Jordan when Ms. Amawi proposed her for an International Visitor project on state and local government. Based on the ideas she developed on this trip, Ms. Hajaia wrote a grant request to the MEPI-funded office of the International Republican Institute to improve municipal governance. This helped Ms. Hajaia prove her leadership qualities which led last year to her becoming the first female elected mayor in Jordan, in the town of Hasa. Currently, the Millenium Challenge Corporation is working with this mayor on local governance issues, a superb outcome due to Ms. Amawi's insight and

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diligence in choosing Ms. Hajaia for an IV many years ago.

## 19. Medical Diplomacy and Outreach to Islamic Women

Ms. Amawi has been an enthusiastic supporter of medical diplomacy. She quickly thought of ways to help the Middle East Partnership for breast cancer awareness and research, helping to enrich this initiative of the Middle East Partnership Initiative by designing a program that complemented the work of the partner institutions. This was a single-country international visitor project to enhance the capacity of the fledgling Jordanian cancer support group "Sanad." Due to the excellent feedback we received, Washington decided to turn this program last year into a regional project. This year it is not just offered to our region but to two other regions as well. Ms. Amawi has always known how to squeeze the most out of each exchange dollar.

10. An example of Basma's pro-active approach was her reaching out to the young women who pursue Islamic studies at the University of Jordan. For several years the Embassy has deepened its engagement with the religious community, inviting many of them on exchange programs. It is Ms. Amawi who has initiated most of these contacts.

Not surprisingly the students and scholars of Islam who had previously been nominated for these exchange programs had always been men. This year, Ms. Amawi hammered out an arrangement with the Dean of the Islamic studies department to send an all-female group to the United States. The university will send a female faculty member along on this trip. Such a development is entirely unprecedented at that Department, but Basma's insistence and perseverance brought it about. Soon, female scholars of Islamic studies will join the hundreds of others who have widened their horizons, narrowed their prejudices, and almost always moderated their views.

The results of Ms. Amawi's hard work and dedication are real, something we saw evidence of in 2007. While the kingdom has not witnessed a complete transformation in its treatment of women, things are changing: Last year saw the first woman, Falak Al-Jamani, elected rather than appointed to parliament. The candidate had been an International Visitor nominated by Ms. Amawi

in 1997. This is just one more example of Ms. Amawi's foresight.

For these and many other accomplishments aimed at attaining equal status for women in Jordan, we believe Ms. Amawi is deserving of recognition.

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